

Family Information News

Responses to transport questions and comments from SEND Parent/Carer representatives

Comment - Many parents are worried about transport arrangements. Some have had letters, some a telephone call, others an email and some have not yet been contacted.

Response - We appreciate that parents worry and that this will be intensified by concerns about COVID-19. We do our best to build confidence, by carrying out individual risk assessments and organising safe and appropriate transport. In making travel arrangements for a child or young person, the role of the transport team is to balance the council's statutory responsibility for providing transport with best value for the tax payer.

The transport team are surprised to hear about the apparent inconsistency of approach with regards to parents being notified of transport arrangements. What is supposed to happen is confirmation of travel arrangements by letter, with this year a COVID related insert:



Coronavirus update for dedicated taxi minibuses 27.8.20.pdf (Command Line)

These letters are necessarily sent out very late in the summer holidays, because new travellers are being added right up to the last minute and beyond. Transport planners are effectively having to complete a huge jigsaw, as the introduction of a new child will impact on all the other travellers. In respect of parent/carers receiving emails and telephone calls, this is likely to be due to the transport team trying to gather information as part of the planning process.

Comment - Parent/carers have worries around pick up times, length of journeys and worries around travelling with children from several different 'bubbles' on one vehicle.

Response:

- Pick up times – the transport team appreciate that families will have preferred pick up times, however one of the consequences of shared group transport is that it is unlikely that all preferences will be able to be accommodated and as such, families do need to be flexible. Timings published are only ever estimates and it

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takes a few weeks at the start of the academic year for routes to 'bed-in'. Variable factors include; traffic, time taken by other travellers, and new and departing travellers.

- Journey length - the transport team understand that this is important and strive to achieve journey times well within the statutory maximum (45 minutes for primary and 75 minutes for secondary). This can sometimes be a challenge in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole if individuals are placed in schools a number of miles from home.
- Bubbles – government guidance is clear that there is no requirement to preserve in-school bubbles within Home to School Transport. They recognise that transport arrangements are organised geographically rather than in year groups. Having said that, dedicated school transport is COVID safe. Details are covered in the insert document, and we will limit on board mixing and maximise social distancing as far as possible.

[Comment - Parents need to know about changes to drivers in order to prepare their children](#)

Response - The transport team understand the value of continuity and the impact of change, however, change is unavoidable. The council has little control over the allocation of drivers as routes are tendered to outside suppliers. As a general rule, minibus drivers remain for an academic year, but taxis will vary day on day. The council can insist on a regular taxi driver but this comes at a cost and is only usually done where a regular driver means no passenger assistant is required. A more common issue is where Passenger Assistants are changed. We try to minimise this in the Bournemouth/Christchurch team by sending an introductory photocard with a photograph of the new Passenger Assistant and their phone number to help prepare children, but this procedure hasn't yet been implemented by the Poole based team as we are yet to fully integrate.

[Comment - Government funding for school transport during COVID. Is there such a thing?](#)

Response - Yes, there is such a thing, two pots of money in fact, but the focus of the spend is on the public transport network as the government is worried that that lack

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of transport might be a barrier to the return to school during the first half term as most mainstream children travel on the bus network.

The first £100K is for demand management purposes. A communications project is underway promoting [active travel](#) and providing information on the work that has been done in partnership with local bus operators to ensure [public bus services](#) are safe.

The second pot of £300K is being used to support public bus operators in adding services to the network where capacity is reduced by social distancing.

BCP Councils SEND transport offer is safe and compliant with government guidance and we would like to reassure everyone that we are working hard to meet the needs of families, whilst working within budgets.

Further information on back to school transport can be found [here](#).

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